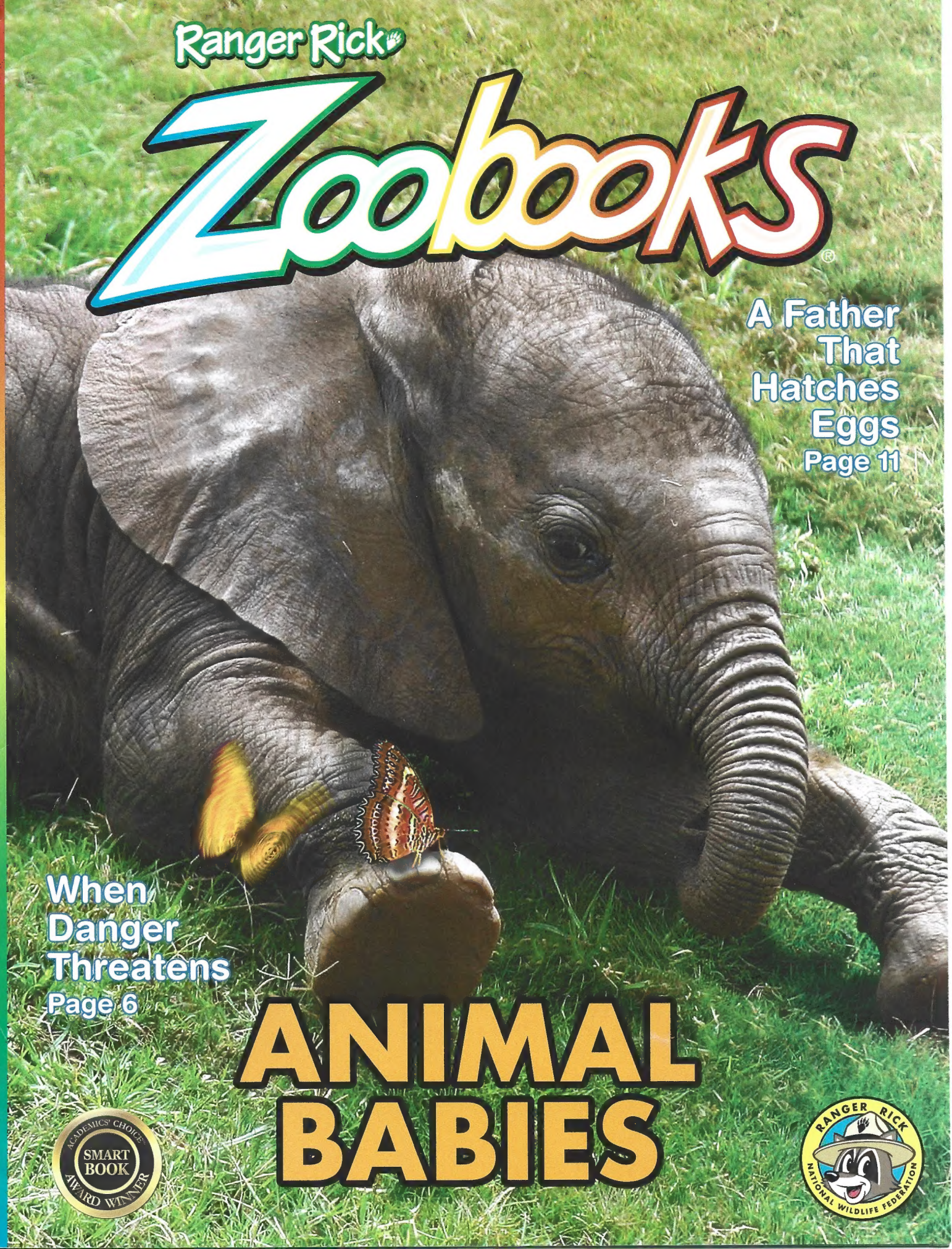
Ranger Rick

Zoobooks®



A Father That Hatches Eggs
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When Danger Threatens
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ANIMAL BABIES

ACADEMICS' CHOICE SMART BOOK AWARD WINNER

RANGER RICK NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Some baby animals are born knowing exactly what to do. When they hatch, snakes will right away slither off to find food. Caterpillars know just the right process for turning themselves into butterflies. Sharks immediately start swimming—and hunting.

But some animals are more helpless when they are born. Some, like rabbits, can't even open their eyes! And lion cubs might be born with a hunter's teeth and claws, but they must be ***taught*** to hunt.

For those animals, there is a lot of training ahead before they can survive on their own. They are usually taught by their mothers. First, she may teach her young to hide. Babies that are not fully developed must be left behind while a parent finds food. When babies are tucked away or hidden (such as deer and gazelles), they are called ***tuckers***.

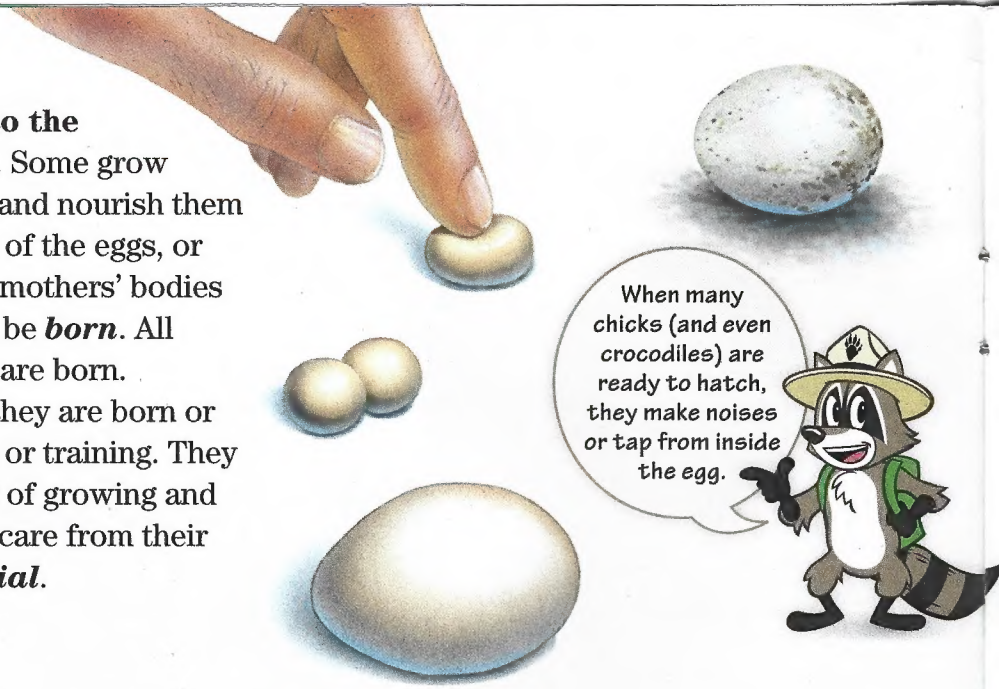
Many grazing animals (such as zebras or gnus) can run with the herd soon after birth. These babies are called ***runners***.

Some babies, like the giraffe, are born looking like little adults. Some, like Francois's langur (where the adult is jet black and the baby is bright gold) don't look the same at all. But all these babies live according to ***adaptations*** that will help them best to survive. Watch them grow!

These wolf pups will not stray far from their babysitter.

Animal babies come into the world in different ways. Some grow inside eggs that protect and nourish them until they are ready to break out of the eggs, or ***hatch***. Others grow inside their mothers' bodies until they are ready to leave and be ***born***. All birds hatch, and most mammals are born.

Some animal babies, whether they are born or hatched, require little or no care or training. They are ***precocial***. Others have a lot of growing and learning to do, and need a lot of care from their parents. These babies are ***altricial***.



Birds, insects, amphibians, some reptiles, some fish, and even two mammals hatch from eggs. The platypus and the echidna, both from Australia, are primitive mammals. They hatch from soft, leathery eggs at a very early stage of development.

Some snakes hatch from leathery eggs that have been kept warm outside the mother's body. Other snakes remain inside the mother's body until the time of birth. Still others are in an egg-like membrane inside the mother. These snakes may hatch from the membrane either just before or shortly after leaving the mother's body.

Butterflies go through many stages to reach adulthood. As an adult, this swallowtail will lay a cluster of eggs. Caterpillars hatch from the eggs and begin to eat and eat and grow and GROW and GROW right out of their skins—several times.

Before a caterpillar sheds its skin for the last time, it attaches itself to a plant stem. Its new skin hardens into a shell called a chrysalis. Inside the chrysalis, the caterpillar dissolves into a thick liquid. New life begins to take form, and eventually a butterfly breaks free of the chrysalis.

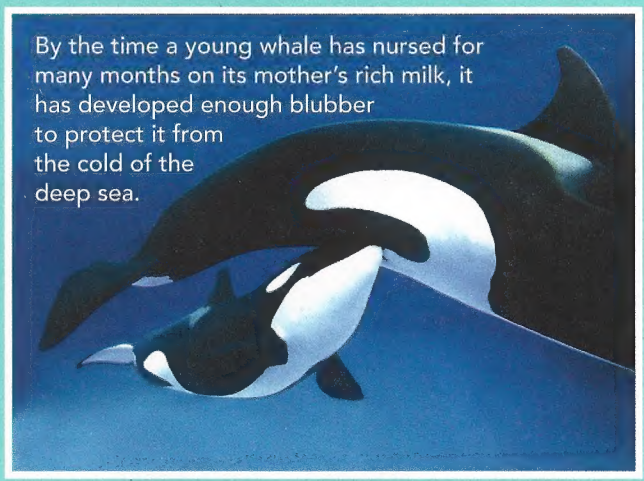
Many hatching animals—snakes, turtles, crocodiles, and most birds—have a temporary "egg tooth" on the beak or snout that helps them break through the shell.

Depending on the species, it can take from a few hours to several days for the young to fight its way out of the egg.

After the hard work of hatching, this exhausted golden eagle chick must rest. Soon after its feathery down is dry and fluffy, this eaglet will be ready for its parents to bring its first meal.

Whales are born underwater. They give birth in bays and lagoons near the shore, where the water is shallow and warmer. The newborn has only a thin coat of blubber—not enough to warm it in cold, deep waters.

Because they are mammals and must breathe oxygen, the mother pushes her young to the surface for its first breath. She may continue to help her baby this way for the first few hours. For several months, the mother and her offspring swim so close together that they almost touch.



By the time a young whale has nursed for many months on its mother's rich milk, it has developed enough blubber to protect it from the cold of the deep sea.

When a giant panda is born, it isn't very giant. It only weighs about ¼ pound. Its mother weighs 200 or more pounds. Panda babies are undeveloped and helpless for several months. When it is about 40 to 60 days old, a panda baby's eyes open for the first time. It begins to crawl at about 3 months. Pandas need their mothers for about a year.

Four Months Old
6½ Pounds

Three Months Old

One Month Old

Newborn
4 Ounces

After a sea turtle digs her nest on a sandy beach, lays her eggs, and covers them with sand, she returns to the sea. She never sees her babies. The eggs are not always safe, because sometimes people dig up the nests to collect and eat the eggs.

If the eggs are left alone, baby sea turtles hatch in two or three months. They dig their way to the surface of the sand and scramble to the sea. Seagulls, frigate birds, crabs, dogs, and other predators grab many of them before they get to the water.

Watch!

Animal babies face many dangers. When animals live in groups or have two parents to take care of the young, the babies are well protected. But some animals, like cheetahs, are solitary, so there is no other parent or group of animals to watch over the babies while the mother hunts for food. These youngsters are taught by their mothers how to hide and be careful. Beyond this, they need to be lucky to avoid predators. Some babies have no parent to protect them. They are on their own immediately.

Snakes are often colored to blend in with their surroundings. Some tropical snakes are as green as the surrounding jungle.

Learn!

The snowshoe hare can change color! In spring and summer its short, brown coat blends in with the weeds and grass. In winter, it wears a thick coat of white fur that hides it in the snow.

A baby deer, or fawn, takes its first steps within a half hour of birth. But it will be at least a week before it is able to follow its mother. In the meantime, the mother hides it where it will be hidden by tall grass, and she licks it to keep it free of scent that would attract predators.

Those that make it to the sea often become food for sea bass, sharks, and other fish. The female hatchlings that survive will return as adults to the same beach, where they will dig their nests each year.

Baby elephants, of course, are too big to be carried. They follow their mothers closely, and when there are obstacles in the path (big rocks or thick mud) the mother and other members of the herd use their trunks to support and guide the calf.

When danger threatens or when it's simply time to move, young animals often get a free ride. Different animals have different ways to carry their young. Many use their mouths to grip their little ones. Others carry their offspring on their backs—and some just let their babies hang on for dear life. Marsupials might provide the easiest form of transportation: they have built-in pouches for carrying the kids.

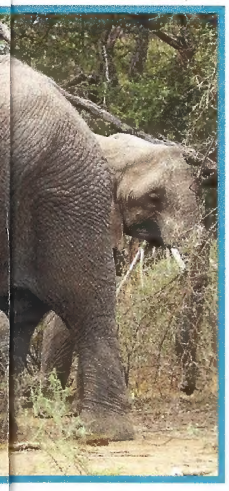
Dogs and cats, whether they are domestic or wild, use their jaws to carry their babies by the scruff of the neck. A mother bear holds its cub's head in her mouth and lets the body dangle. Infant apes and monkeys grip their mothers' belly fur and hang on tightly. This is especially important if the mother is agile in the trees and swings from branch to branch. Which style of transportation seems the most fun to you?

As soon as scorpions are born, they climb onto their mother's back. They ride there for a week or more and are protected from predators by their mother's stinger.

A crocodile mother takes very good care of her young. She guards the nest until her babies hatch, then scoops them into her mouth and carries them to a pond, where she watches over them for several months.

Giant pandas can't even crawl until they are three or four months old, so a mother panda must carry her infant frequently. Just like a cat or a dog, she carries it in her jaws by the back of the neck.

This young koala has outgrown its mother's pouch and now rides on her back. The youngster's hands and feet are strong enough to grip onto its mother's thick fur.



A young kangaroo, or joey, stays nestled in its mother's pouch for six months after it is born. During the next few months, it jumps out of the pouch if it wants to explore or play. It jumps back in for a nap, to eat, and to feel safe.

A zebra mother is the only one responsible for her foal. When the herd travels, females walk in single file according to their status in the herd. Each mother keeps her youngster close by. The stallion usually follows to protect his herd of females.

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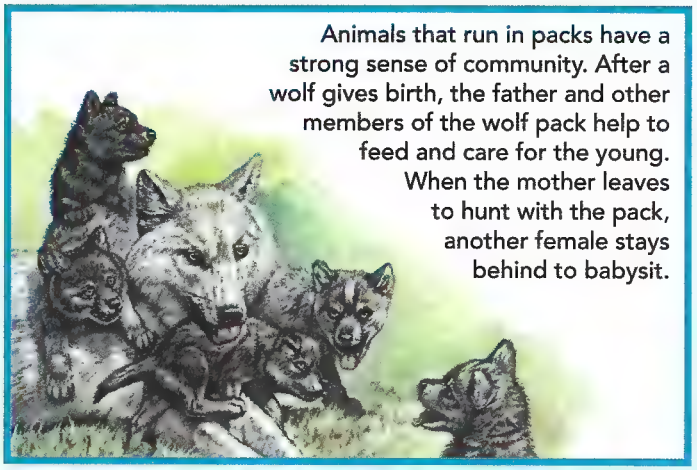
Do young giraffes go to day-care centers? Yes! Small groups of very young giraffes are sometimes left in the care of an adult babysitter. Many animal babies are cared for like this when their mothers have to go off to feed, including a few fish, frogs, ducks, and dogs. There is safety in numbers. Having helpers in the community to care for the young means that more baby animals will survive.



Animals that run in packs have a strong sense of community. After a wolf gives birth, the father and other members of the wolf pack help to feed and care for the young. When the mother leaves to hunt with the pack, another female stays behind to babysit.

Within a herd, some horses have a higher status than others. The higher the status, the more power a horse has in the group. A group of young foals has a very low status. But a foal that stays near its mother shares her status.

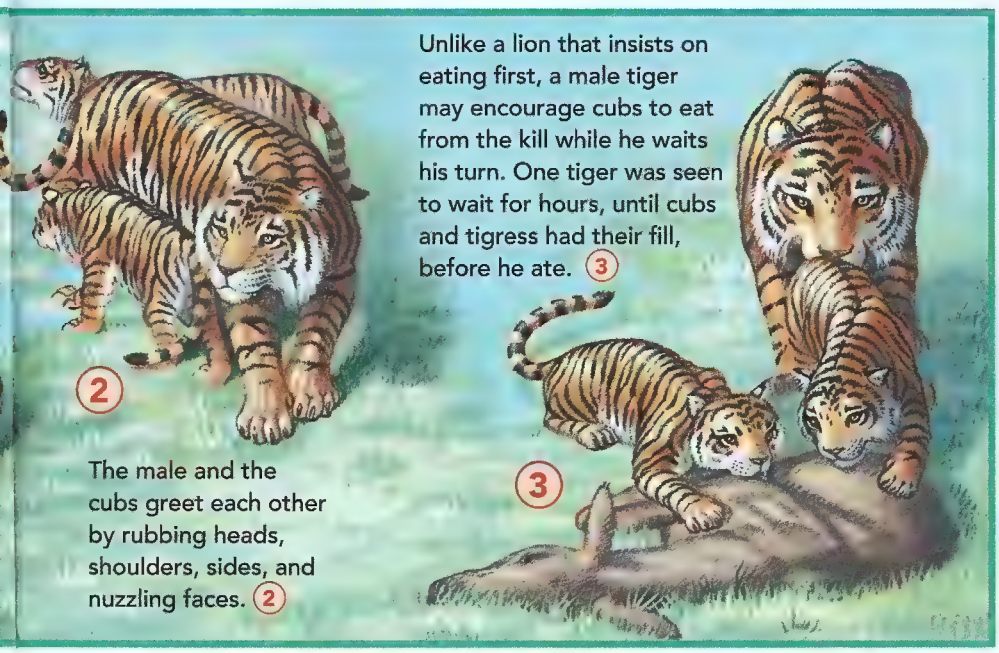
Female dolphins serve as "aunties" to help protect the babies from danger. They often work together, forming "playpens" around the young by swimming in a circle. This lets the babies play together in safety.

Tigers are solitary, but sometimes there will be friendly meetings at kills. Males don't usually help in raising their offspring, but sometimes share food with females and cubs. (1)

Ha ha!

Lions are social animals and live in large groups called prides. A pride may consist of 20 or more individuals—a few males, several related females, and their young. The lionesses in a pride raise their cubs together, even nursing cubs that are not their own. Males in a pride are quite tolerant of the cubs. But when it's time to feed at a kill, cubs and lionesses must wait until the lion feeds. If there isn't much food, cubs may get nothing.

When is a father also a mother? When it's a seahorse! Seahorses share the most basic duties of parenting. When the female seahorse lays her eggs, she puts them into a brood pouch on the male seahorse's body. He carries the eggs around and keeps them safe. When the seahorses hatch, it looks like their father is giving birth!



The male and the cubs greet each other by rubbing heads, shoulders, sides, and nuzzling faces. (2)

Unlike a lion that insists on eating first, a male tiger may encourage cubs to eat from the kill while he waits his turn. One tiger was seen to wait for hours, until cubs and tigress had their fill, before he ate. (3)

After the female emperor or king penguin lays her single egg, the male rolls it onto his feet, where he keeps it nestled under a heavily feathered flap of skin called a brood patch. While father broods, the mother fishes to feed both of them. After two months, the chick hatches. Now, the parents take turns carrying the chick on their feet. Eventually the chick is left in a packed nursery, while the parents continue to fish. When they return, their chick recognizes its parents' call.

Young animals learn survival skills in many ways. Some skills are there at birth. A rattlesnake, for example, begins to produce venom before it is born. From the moment of its birth, it can deliver a venomous bite to protect itself or to obtain food.

Some skills are a matter of ***instinct***. Instinct drives sea turtle hatchlings to dash for the sea, and instinct points them in the right direction.

Skills for hunting and for recognizing danger are ***taught*** to the young—usually by their mothers.

But probably the favorite way to develop survival skills is through play! When young animals race, wrestle, and play together, they become more coordinated and strengthen their muscles. Cheetah cubs pounce on their mother's switching tail and develop skills for stalking and capturing prey.

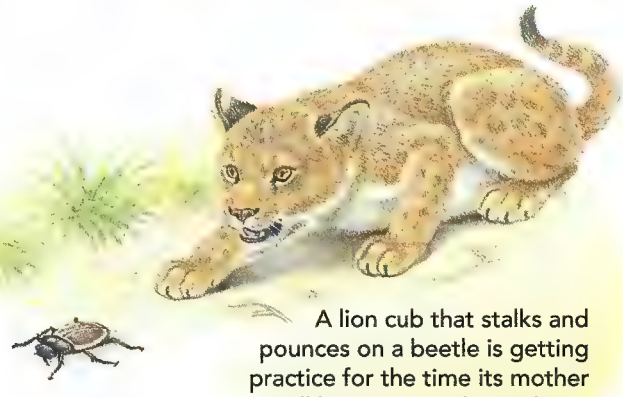
Bear cubs learn to hunt and fish from their mothers. They also learn what plants and berries are good to eat. Mother bears even teach their cubs to climb trees to escape predators when they are too small to defend themselves.

Mother skunks teach their young how to hunt for insects and small mammals and how to dig for grubs. For their first six months, the kits follow mom everywhere.

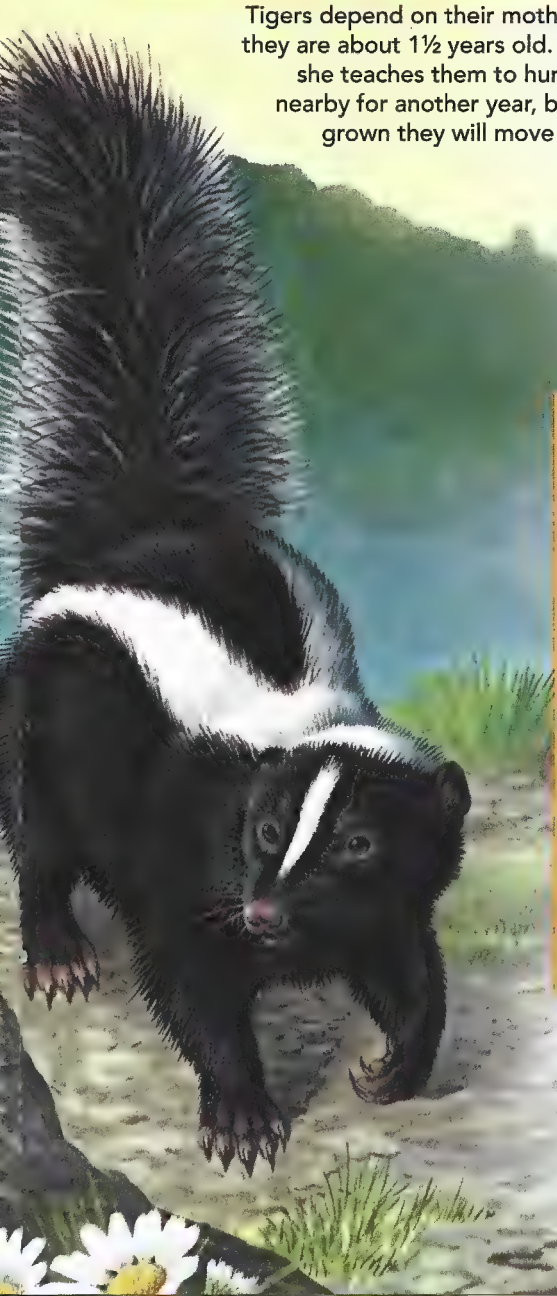
Skunks are born with the black-and-white colors that warn predators away. Before they are a month old, they can spray their stinky musk. This is their only protection.

Play is important exercise for young deer. They chase each other and develop their running skills. This helps them escape from predators. They learn social skills, too.

Tigers depend on their mothers for food until they are about 1½ years old. During this time, she teaches them to hunt. They may stay nearby for another year, but when they are grown they will move off on their own.



A lion cub that stalks and pounces on a beetle is getting practice for the time its mother will begin to teach it to hunt.



An elephant calf learns what to eat, where to find water, and how to respond to danger by watching all the members of its herd—older calves, young mothers, old aunts, and the ***matriarch***, or leader, of the herd. When baby elephants play, they trumpet, flap their ears, and play grown-up by charging at each other. When an elephant herd senses real danger, though, the largest females move together, ears spread, trunks raised, ready to charge. The calves, protected behind and beneath the adults, join in—trumpeting and shaking their heads as though it were playtime.

Some animals are ready for independence at birth—they may leave their mothers immediately, or they may never see their mothers. Others might need a short year or two of training before they can protect and provide for themselves.

But for some animals, it is a long time before they're ready to live on their own. Orangutans, gorillas, and chimpanzees don't head off or join another troop for 7 to 10 years or more. It takes them this long to grow up.

Elephants have the longest growing-up periods. There is a lot to learn if you are an elephant. Males leave the herd when they are about 12 to 14, but they will not become fathers for many years yet. Female elephants usually stay with the herd. They have their first calf at about 13 and continue to gain experience and learn from the group. A female with great knowledge and experience may one day be matriarch.

Gopher snakes, like most snakes that lay eggs, deposit their eggs in a warm spot (in grasses, leaves, moss, or sand) where the heat incubates them. The eggs hatch on their own in about 70 days. The adult snake has no contact with her offspring.

At about one year, bobcats are ready to strike out on their own to hunt rabbits, rodents, squirrels, and other small mammals. They are at home in any wilderness where water is available.

Ducks are precocial. They hatch ready to go. They can walk, swim, and eat solid food, making life easier for the mother duck. Their mother is the first thing the ducklings see after they hatch. They follow her everywhere and do what she does. If the first thing they saw was a dog, they would follow the dog instead of their mother. This is called ***imprinting***. It will be several months before the ducklings are able to fly.

Spiders have an adventurous way of announcing their independence. When it's time to leave the nursery web they share with other spiderlings, they climb to the top of a blade of grass, a flower, or any exposed spot where they can catch the wind. (1)

When the spiderling reaches the top, it spins a few thin threads of silk and keeps them attached to its abdomen while it waits for a breeze to carry it away. (2)

The spiderling is lifted on a breath of air and sails off on a silken thread to an unknown destination—maybe hundreds of miles away. If it balloons successfully and lands safely, it will be ready to find food. (3)

When lizards hatch, they are ready to catch insects and start their independent lives.

They must be watchful, though, that something doesn't catch them.

Baby rabbits, called kittens, are born deaf, blind, and hairless. But they are out of the nest at two weeks, weaned and grazing at three weeks, and probably abandoned by their mothers at four to six weeks, while she prepares for a new litter. In this short time, they have learned to take care of themselves and escape danger.

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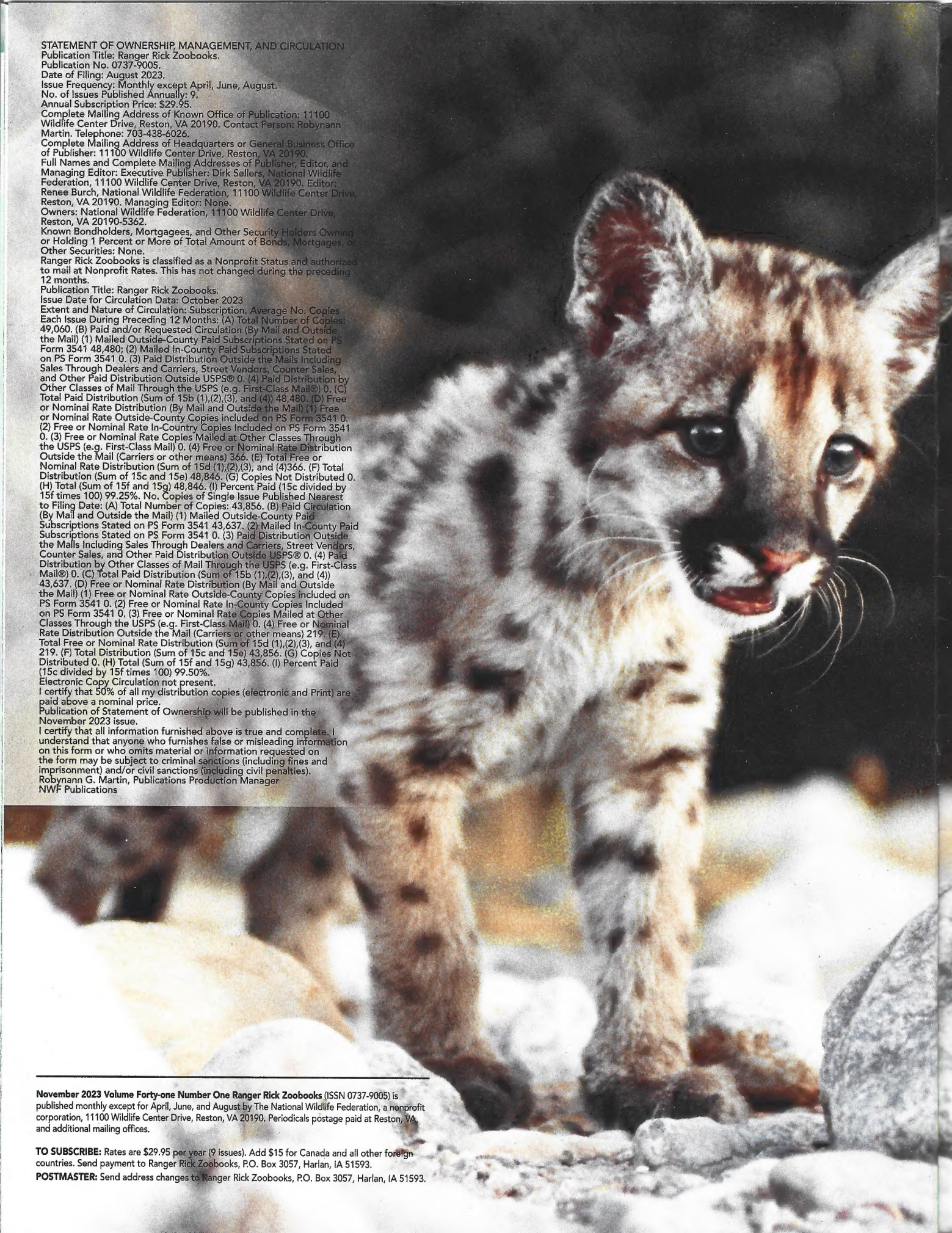

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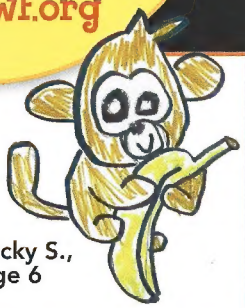
Zooworks®

Abigail A., age 12

Ethan M., age 9

Lucy A., age 8



Ricky S., age 6

Lora Z., age 7

Lyla & Clay S., age 10

The babies of every species
Develop their own way.
Some jump up right away
And live to see another day.
Giraffes' and deer's little ones
Don't waste a moment of light.
After a few minutes, proudly stand aright
Though wobbly in spite.
Bunnies and birds are different
3-4 weeks in the nest
Where all day they play and rest
And then jump up in zest.
Every animal is unique
With some living high and some living low
And some by the creek.

By Natalie B., age 11

Henry J., age 8

Fluffy and yellow,
What a cute little fellow!
Innocent and sweet,
Look how they eat!
Scurrying around,
They go Cheep! Cheep!
What am I? A baby chick!

By Jade S., age 10

Elliana S., age 11

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A Baby African Elephant
Born at over 200 pounds, African elephant babies are some of the largest on earth! But it takes several years to learn all the skills they will need to survive on the savanna.

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Do you like to draw or write? We love to publish our readers' creative work! Go to **www.rangerrick.org/zooworks** for rules and deadlines. ***Plus,*** we've got some fun activity pages for you, all about animal babies. And don't forget the videos and games! See you there.

Show Us What You Know About Animal Babies! Kahoot!

Visit us at rangerrick.org!

Ranger Rick Zoobooks

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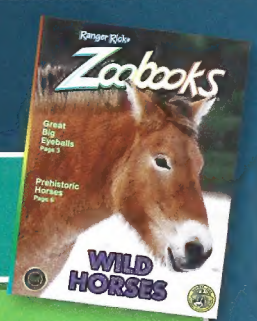

WILD HORSES

Did you know that wild horses (and domestic horses) run on their toenails? That's right! Their toenails are made of the same material as yours—but theirs are much stronger.

Want to tell Ranger Rick a story or joke or ask him a question? Visit rangerrick.org/submit-a-video.

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